

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
----- 047614

P 261615Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7891  
INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 0968

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR SY ET US

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PLF LEADER OSMAN SABBE

REF: A. STATE 0127773; B. ADDIS ABABA 0657; C. STATE 013332;  
D. DAMASCUS 0414; E. STATE 014276

1. POL COUNSELOR CALLED ON ACTING AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR  
WOOBISHET MARSIE HAZEN AFTERNOON JAN. 26 TO CARRY OUT IN-  
STRUCTION PER REF. C.

2. IN CARRYING OUT THAT INSTRUCTION POL COUNSELOR USED FOLLOWING  
LANGUAGE PER REFTTEL:

BEGIN QUOTE: I WISH TO INFORM YOU OFFICIALLY THAT IN  
VIEW OF THE DECEMBER 30 AP INTERVIEW WITH OSMAN SALE SABBE,  
THE REPORTED ELF/PLF SUMMIT, AND THE RELEASE BY THE ELF OF  
TWO AMERICAN CAPTIVES ON JANUARY 9 LAST, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT  
FELT IT ADVISABLE TO MEET DIRECTLY WITH OSMAN TO INQUIRE  
ABOUT THE CONDITION OF PLF CAPTIVES AND TO URGE THEIR UN-  
CONDITIONAL RELEASE.

"I ALSO WISH TO ADVISE YOU THAT IN THE EVENT OSMAN IN-  
FORMS THE PRESS OF THE MEETING AND WE RECEIVE PRESS INQUIRIES,  
WE INTEND TO CONFIRM THAT THE MEETING TOOK PLACE.

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"IF ASKED WHETHER THAT MEETING INVOLVED NEGOTIATIONS FOR

THE RELEASE OF THE KAGNEW CAPTIVES WE WILL SAY NO, THAT U.S. POLICY IN KIDNAPPING SITUATIONS IS WELL-KNOWN. END QUOTE.

3. IN TAKING NOTE OF THIS INFORMATION WOOBISHET OBSERVED THAT HE WOULD PASS IT ALONG TO HIS SUPERIORS. HE THOUGHT THAT THESE SUPERIORS WOULD CONSTRUCT THIS INFORMATION AS A SHIFT IN THE USG'S POSTURE FROM DIALOGUE TO RECOGNITION AND NEGOTIATION.

4. POL COUNSELOR CAUTIONED AGAINST INTERPRETATION OF LANGUAGE CITED ABOVE. HE CHARACTERIZED EXCHANGE AS DIALOG AND SAID THAT HE HAD CAREFULLY STATED TO WOOBISHET REASONS WHICH HAD IMPELLED USG REP MEET WITH OSMAN SABBE. HE ALSO REPEATED THAT USG HAD URGED PRISONERS "UNCONDITIONAL" RELEASE AND THAT NO RPT NO NEGOTIATIONS INVOLVED.

5. POL COUNSELOR ALSO USED OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE MOFA OFFICER WITH BRIEFING PROVIDED REF E PARA 3 ON KAGNEW TWO. LATTER HAD NO RPT NO COMMENT THEREON.

6. ONE HALF HOUR AFTER THE END OF THIS CONVERSATION, ACTING AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR TELEPHONED AND ASKED POL COUNSELOR TO RETURN TO THE MINISTRY. UPON LATTER'S ARRIVAL THERE HE WAS RECEIVED BY ATO TEFERRA SHAWL (MOFA SPOKESMAN), ATO ALEMAYEHU SEIFU (AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR CURRENTLY ON TDY IN MOFA) AS WELL AS ATO WOOBISHET.

7. ATO TEFERRA OPENED WITH CONCILIATORY REMARKS ON ANOTHER SUBJECT TO BE REPORTED SUBSEQUENTLY IN SEPTTEL. AFTER THESE PRELIMINARIES ATO WOOBISHET SAID THAT HE HAD PASSED POL COUNSELOR'S STATEMENT TO THE ACTING FONMIN, ATO GETACHEW KIBRET. AS HE (WOOBISHET) HAD ANTICIPATED, ACTING FONMIN HAD CHARACTERIZED STATEMENT AS "UNFORTUNATE."

8. AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR ALEMAYEHU SEIFU THEN SAID THAT MOFA'S REACTIONS TO STATEMENT WERE "HIGHLY NEGATIVE." IT WAS FELT THAT "THIS IS A NEW DEPARTURE IN US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ETHIOPIA."

9. ATO TEFERRA THEN NOTED THAT USG'S POSITION THAT EXCHANGE WITH OSMAN SABBE "NOT NEGOTIATIONS" ACADEMIC IN THE SENSE THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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QUESTION OF NATURE THIS CONVERSATION UNLIKELY BE RAISED. "MERE FACT OF CONTACT IMPLIES RECOGNITION ON THE PART OF US OF MOVEMENT WHICH IS DETRIMENTAL TO ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY." MORE-OVER, US REP MET WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS BEEN CONDEMNED BY EPMG IN ITS PUBLIC DECLARATIONS.

10. ATO ALEMAYEHU SEIFU THEN ADDED THAT FOR THE AFORECITED REASONS MEETING IN QUESTION "COULD NOT BE VIEWED BY EPMG AND

ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE AS A FRIENDLY ACT."

11. TEFERRA SHAWL THEN ENDED WITH STATEMENT THAT IF NEWS OF MEETING LEAKS PEOPLE WILL SAY THAT USG HAS RECOGNIZED, IS IN TOUCH WITH, AND IS NEGOTIATING WITH PLF. FOR SOME THIS WILL CONFIRM SUSPICIONS THEY ENTERTAINING OF US ATTITUDES TOWARDS ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. MOFA OF COURSE AWARE THAT US POLICY TOWARDS ETHIOPIA IS SINCERE AND MOFA WOULD WISH TO AVOID ANY SUCH INFERENCE BY OTHERS WHO MAY NOT SHARE THIS VIEW.

12. POL COUNSELOR, IN TAKING NOTE OF THE FOREGOING, REITERATED THAT NEGOTIATIONS NOT RPT NOT INVOLVED. EPMG HAD BEEN INFORMED AT OUTSET LATEST SPATE OF KIDNAP PROBLEMS OF STORE WHICH USG SETS BY INITIATION AND MAINTENANCE OF DIALOGUE WITH TERRORISTS AS PART OF PROCESS TO OBTAIN UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF HOSTAGES. TEXT OF STATEMENT IS EXPLICIT. THERE IS NO QUESTION OF RECOGNITION AND USG'S ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF EPMG'S EFFORTS SAFEGUARD ETHIOPIA'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY IS A MATTER OF RECORD. INFERENCE THAT MEETING CONSTITUTES A NEW DEPARTURE IN US POLICY TOWARDS ETHIOPIA ACCORDINGLY UNWARRANTED. POL COUNSELOR UNDERTOOK PROMPTLY TRANSMIT MOFA OFFICERS' REPRESENTATIONS TO DEPT HOWEVER.

13. ALEYMAYEHU SEIFU THEN SAID THAT MOFA HOPES TO RECEIVE WASHINGTON'S REACTIONS TO ITS REPRESENTATIONS SOON. MEANWHILE, IT WOULD FORBEAR PASS SUBSTANCE THIS EXCHANGE TO "HIGHER AUTHORITY."

14. COMMENT AND ACTION REQUESTED: IN EMBASSY'S VIEW, SHARP MOFA RESPONSE SET FORTH ABOVE CIRCUMSCRIBED BY FOLLOWING FACTORS:

A. BRIEF TIME WHICH ELAPSED BETWEEN ORIGINAL PRESENTATION OF OUR STATEMENT AND MOFA'S SUMMONS FOR SECOND SESSION STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT ACTING FONMIN PROCEEDED ON HIS OWN WITHOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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FURTHER CONSULTATIONS WITHIN EPMG.

B. ALTHOUGH WORDS ARE SHARP IT APPEARS SIGNIFICANT THAT ENTIRE EXCHANGE DELIBERATELY CONFINED TO WORKING LEVELS. MOREOVER, TONE OF MEETING WAS CALM AND NOT UNFRIENDLY THROUGHOUT.

C. WE THINK THAT ACTING FONMIN, BESIDES PERCEIVING NEED PUT PROMPT SHARP REACTION ON RECORD, IS TACTICALLY CONCERNED WITH INSTRUCTIONS DEPT HAS GIVEN ITS SPOKESMAN TO CONFIRM US REP'S MEETING WITH OSMAN SABBE, IF ASKED. WE BELIEVE THAT MOFA OFFICERS ARE SINCERE IN THE EXPRESSION OF THEIR CONCERN WITH INFERENCE WHICH COULD BE DRAWN BY SOME THAT USG PREPARED DEAL WITH REBELS AT ETHIOPIA'S EXPENSE.

15. ACCORDINGLY, DEPT MAY WISH CONSIDER WHETHER OR NOT SPOKESMAN

MIGHT BE INSTRUCTED NEITHER TO CONFIRM NOR TO DENY  
MEETING BETWEEN US REP AND OSMAN SABBE IN THE CONTINGENCY  
QUESTION IS POSED. IN RESPONDING TO ETH OT.  
MY REPRESENTATIONS  
DEPT MAY ALSO WISH TO DIRECT US TO REITERATE "ON INSTRUCTIONS" THAT  
USG'S ATTITUDE AND POLICY TOWARDS EPMG UNCHANGED.

16. ADVISE.  
TIENKEN

NOTE BY OC/T: TEXT AS RECEIVED.

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## Message Attributes

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